



## **Unemployment Insurance Application Process Faster and More Efficient with Document Upload Feature**

Customers expressed a desire for improved speed and efficiency during the Unemployment Insurance (UI) application process. Department of Workforce Development (DWD) listened to those concerns and deployed a new electronic document upload feature in late 2023 that has simplified procedural requirements for applicants, minimized the need for follow-up communication and helped streamline the DWD internal review process.

“Before this was in place, claimants had to fax or deliver their paperwork,” said Project Manager Jeremie Dexter. “In the past, the review process could have taken 24 hours or maybe several days or even weeks during high-volume periods. We released the document upload feature to make things easier for them.”

According to Dexter, the document upload concept has been a priority for DWD since 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a delay in the process of implementation.

“Like other agencies around the country, we were backlogged as a result of the pandemic,” he said. “The Department of Labor said states weren’t prepared, so they made money available to help correct the problem and Indiana was one of the first to submit a request.

“A (third party) came in here to conduct an assessment during the third or fourth quarter of 2022. The group is part of a Department of Labor-funded program called Tiger Teams. They reviewed DWD’s processes and made 13 recommendations. One of those was to provide document upload capabilities for claimants so DWD made that its top priority.”

UI Benefits Manager Brandon Raber came on board with DWD to assist in the development of the document upload feature as the process began in the first quarter of 2023.

“We talked with Hal Bent, a Program Coordinator from Massachusetts, so we could learn what we should and shouldn’t do since they had already implemented document upload,” Dexter said.

Now claimants have a modern and more efficient way to file required paperwork for the adjudication process.

Justin Davis, DWD’s Associate Chief of Customer Experience, continued.

“We’re trying very hard to meet customers where they want to be met. That is a focus for all of us,” Davis said. “We want to get better every day.

“We’re able to receive significantly more documents in a shorter amount of time and are able to review them more quickly,” Davis said. “When items are faxed, they’re sometimes hard to read and if that’s the case, additional follow-up correspondence is often required.”

While not all claimants reach the adjudication process, having the ability to electronically submit paperwork lessens a major headache for those who do.

Available on a given user's Homepage within the UI Claimant Self Service portal, document submission prompts are initiated by DWD staff as information is needed. Whether captured by a cell phone camera or scanned and then turned in electronically, submitted paperwork is immediately available for staff review.

"The convenience can't be underrated," Raber added. "This creates a streamlined process."

As utilization of the electronic filing process has gained momentum, Raber also believes its availability has potentially made unemployment insurance-related services more appealing and accessible to a larger group of people.

"We're now able to reach a wider audience and to potentially have the ability to help more claimants," he said. "The document upload option has lowered barriers by making the process more attractive to those who prefer electronic filing methods. We're going to continue to work toward streamlining this process and making it as transparent as we can."

As an additional enhancement, Google Translate has been added as an option to help with language barriers.

DWD employees are also benefiting as an increasing number of claimants are taking advantage of the document upload feature. In fact, when electronic submissions are received, investigators find themselves with high-quality images that can easily be shared, if needed.

"Our employees also have an experience throughout this process, so we have to try to make their jobs easier too," Davis said. "For them, the document upload feature could mean one less phone call or follow-up interaction they have. Ultimately with this, there is time savings and improved efficiency on both sides."

However, DWD continues to allow customers to interact with the agency through whatever method is preferred.

"This isn't the only way to communicate with us. It's one additional channel," said DWD Chief Unemployment Insurance Officer Noah Shelton. "If you prefer to communicate with us by fax or mail, that's perfectly fine. We want to serve claimants the best we can and that starts by offering multiple communication preferences."